



## Commonwealth of Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission Partners to Conserve Laurel Fork Stream Corridor** *Acres of forested land to be protected*

**Frankfort, Ky.** (Jan. 7, 2013) – Because of a multiagency partnership, more than 1,000 forested acres along the Laurel Fork in Whitley County will now be protected.

The Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission (KSNPC) has partnered with the Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund, the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust, the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife Service, the Kentucky Division of Forestry and the estate of the late William Dennis Benge of Fort Wright, Kentucky to protect 1,864 forested acres along Laurel Fork in Whitley County.

Additional funds provided by American Electric Power, whose subsidiary Kentucky Power serves a significant portion of eastern Kentucky, helped make the purchase possible through a grant provided under a consent decree with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), under the Clean Air Act.

The purchase protects a significant portion of one of the largest forest blocks in Kentucky and lies in the watershed along the Laurel Fork in Whitley County. These tracts contain significant natural areas that include globally rare species of plants such as the rock harlequin and blue mountainmint; fish, such as the federally threatened blackside dace and Cumberland arrow darter; as well as federally listed mussels.

“This effort establishes a new nature preserve for the state on the southern end of Pine Mountain and is an impressive acquisition involving multiple partners,” said Carl Breeding, nature preserves commission chairman.

The commission purchased the land from the Kentucky Natural Lands Trust (KNLT), a nonprofit organization directed by Hugh Archer. “KNLT purchased the land

from the private landowner, paid for its first survey and cleared title issues,” Archer said. “It was sold to the commission at a significant discount and supported by funds from the Indiana Bat Mitigation Fund, which is overseen by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).”

Lee Andrews, supervisor of the USFWS Kentucky field office said, “The USFWS is pleased to be able to help make this purchase happen. Protecting the forested slopes of Pine Mountain in Whitley County and a small hibernaculum for the Indiana bat will conserve important habitat for this endangered species. This is especially critical as these beneficial insect-eating mammals are being decimated by White Nose Syndrome in many parts of the country.”

The late William Dennis Benge, of Fort Wright, bestowed a \$202,000 donation upon the commission with the stipulation that the money be used to purchase and protect exceptional land. “We think Mr. Benge would be pleased with this purchase,” said Breeding. “It will be the eighth state nature preserve on Pine Mountain. This southwest to northeast migratory corridor for wildlife is one way black bears moved back into Kentucky.”

Breeding said partnerships in these days of fiscal austerity are critical. “We are fortunate to protect the Laurel Fork watershed. We welcome the newest state nature preserve in the Commonwealth thanks to the efforts of so many. The commission could not have accomplished this alone.”

KNLT is continuing to work to protect even more of this portion of Pine Mountain, in one of the most rugged, least developed areas of Kentucky. With continued success, this area of protected land will grow significantly.

To learn more about the commission and its work protecting natural lands and rare and endangered species, contact the office at 502-573-2886, visit online at <http://naturepreserves.ky.gov> or Facebook at <http://facebook.com/ksnpc>.

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